

# Prologue

Barnaby Figg couldn't tear his eyes away from the sight of the old woman in the enormous glass jar. Clumps of grey hair swam around her face before setting like jellied eels. Her dress twisted like a hungry snake around her legs and large belly.

Barnaby was transfixed, unaware of his own injuries. Her already wrinkled face was creased beyond all recognition, and two hooded eyes, full of anger and resentment, glared accusingly at him. He stared back at what now resembled a large and demented pickled walnut. It isn't nice

to be hated by a walnut, especially a large and demented one.

He tried to look away, but realized with a jolt that he couldn't. Granny had been right – pickling was in his blood, and he had just been involved in the darkest pickling of all.



# Chapter 1

## The Purple Mansion

### Four Days Earlier. . .

Barnaby opened his eyes and stared up at the revolting violet ceiling. He closed them again tightly, trying to shut out the hideous lilacs and mauves that surrounded him. He was staying in one of his Granny Hogsflesh's many bedrooms in her enormous mansion, in the middle of town. Everything was a shade of purple. It made her feel sophisticated, but it made Barnaby feel sick. He tried to imagine he was back in his little bed at home. His old bedroom was about the same size as the bed he was lying in now; in fact, the

whole of his house could fit into just one of Granny's bedrooms. He loved his home. It was just outside of town by the Forest of Fen, and he was happy there. But then his dad left them.

Barnaby had watched him go from his bedroom window. His dad had pushed his collar up against the driving rain, pulled his pea green hat down firmly on his head, slipped through the garden gate and disappeared into the forest, checking over his shoulder as he went. Barnaby had no idea that would be the last time he would see him. But the hours turned into days, and the days to weeks. Eventually with no word from him and little money left, Barnaby's mum packed up a few of their possessions and moved in with her mother, Granny Hogsflesh. Granny pronounced her name *Ho-flay*, but everyone knew she was really a "Hogs-flesh".

"BARNABY?"

His eyes flew open as a rattling screech from the hall outside sent a wave of dread through his body.

“BARNABEEEE!”

It was her – Granny Hogsflesh.

“Barnaby, where are you, boy?”

“In my room, Granny Hogsflesh,” he said, sitting up as the brass doorknob rattled. It was the shape and colour of a large pickled onion. All the doorknobs were. The onion turned and his grandmother stomped in.

“*Ho-flay*, boy, it is pronounced *Ho-flay*,” she croaked. “What are you up to? You’re going to be late for breakfast.”

“I’m just . . . enjoying the view from my window.”

Barnaby pointed towards a big red neon sign on a colossal factory opposite, smoke billowing out of its three massive chimneys.

# Hogsflesh pickle Company

“Ah, yes,” she whispered, and waddled over to look out. Her wrinkled old face was bathed in the red light and she looked like a fiendish prune. She was not much taller than Barnaby, but she was ten times wider. Bristly chins rippled down her heavy neck and joined the waves of flesh billowing out under her purple velvet dress, gathering at a huge belly.

“*Ho-flay* Pickles,” she sighed.

She was dribbling slightly and a trickle had run down one of her chins, making her thick lips look like a pair of friendly slugs. She beckoned him over with a fleshy finger and he forced himself to take a step closer.



“One day, if you work hard and impress me, you could be the boss of all this,” she said, waving a wobbly arm at the enormous factory. Barnaby glanced out of the window, and then over at his grandmother. She was bossy, loud and smelled of pickled cabbage. He didn’t want to be any of those things.

“I’m not sure if I want to be a pickling boss, Granny,” he said, quietly.

“Of course you do, you stupid boy. Pickling is in your blood.”

She leaned closer and her vinegary breath enveloped him, making it hard to breathe.

“Your grandfather and I, God pickle his soul, built this empire up from nothing.”

She was right next to him now and he staggered back, but she grabbed his arm.

“I’m not getting any younger, and the time has come to prepare my successor.”



Barnaby tried to pull away, but his legs felt weak.

“I d-don’t understand,” he said.

“I need an heir, and your mother isn’t interested. Your father turned her against the ancient art of pickling.”

She snorted angrily, and a fine mist of spittle settled over Barnaby’s face. “It’s because of him she won’t work in my factory. All she’s interested in now is fresh produce. Ridiculous! Fresh food is just a fad. It will never last.”

Barnaby wiped his face on his sleeve as Granny looked him up and down. “It would have been nice to have someone with a bit of spirit,” she sniffed, “but unfortunately, you’re all I have.”

She was staring at him intently, still holding on to his arm. Then she pulled him close, stuck her long, cold nose in his ear and whispered, “You were born to pickle, Barnaby.”

He felt sick. Having someone's nose in your ear is bad enough, but it's even worse when it belongs to your granny.

"Dad thinks I could be big in peas," he said, shakily.

Barnaby's dad was a pea picker, which meant plenty of peas, but not much money.

"Big in peas?" spat Granny, pushing him away from her. "Look where 'big in peas' gets you – my daughter and my grandson, abandoned in a shack with no money. Your father was a fool."

"It wasn't a shack," Barnaby said, struggling to hold back the tears. "And my dad wasn't a fool – I mean, he isn't a fool."

"Oh, you think he's coming back, do you? WELL, HE'S NOT," she yelled. "He's abandoned you and he's abandoned your mother. And that's why you have to live with me. So forget about him, forget about peas and

start thinking pickles.”

She walked towards the door.

“And don’t be late for breakfast.”

Then she left the room, the onion handle shaking as the door slammed.

